The University of Chicago

UNITED STATES POSTAL DEVELOPMENT, 1607-1931: SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

1935

By

ROSS ALLAN McREYNOLDS

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1937

The University of Chicago

UNITED STATES POSTAL DEVELOPMENT, 1607-1931: SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

1935

By

ROSS ALLAN McREYNOLDS

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1937

R. UNIV.
BIBLIOTHEEK
LEIDEN

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The United States Post Office was one of the chief contributors in the development of the spirit of that nation which, first among the peoples of the great westward colonial migration, cast off the political ties of the Old World and appropriated for itself the term "American." Political and religious persecution, long and devastating wars, and toil and want arising from what appeared as overpopulation and inadequate natural resources to the pre-machine and pre-scientific age, brought large numbers of men, women, and children from England, Germany, Ireland, France, Holland, Sweden, and other countries to seek homes, wealth, or freedom in the colonies of the New World. Postal service was one of the chief means by which social and intellectual contacts were maintained and enlarged.

Colonial postal development was slow and irregular. The United States Post Office was preceded by three types of postal service among the Colonial "Americans." First shipmasters, traders, and tavern keepers somewhat informally forwarded mail. Colonial governors dispatched messengers with official mail and hoped the public would add enough letters to bear the expenses of permanent regular communication. The permanent Colonial Post Office, which originated in a royal grant to a British Treasury official, and later was brought under Crown control, was extended into all the British colonies of continental North America before the Revolution.

The small public use of even the regular service one to three times a week at the end of the Colonial period was due to

the physical isolation of the settlements, the social and racial heritage of the people, and the late development of widespread economic relationships. Colonies had been founded several decades before settlement opened the wilderness and assured shelter and sustenance for intercolonial messengers. Until a generation grew up that regarded America as its home, overseas events drew most attention. Early Colonial trade was largely with Europe, Africa, or the West Indies, as the products of neighboring colonies were much the same. The conquest of the land was the chief goal, and postal effort was concentrated on piercing the wilderness and crossing rivers, swamps, and the dreary seashore sands along routes between the large cities, especially Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.

As inland settlement proceeded, the neighborly service of shipmasters and port innkeepers, noted for its irregularity and slovenly care of both the outgoing letters placed in bags hung on the walls of coffee-houses and the incoming ones spread on tables or counters for distribution, was strained to the breaking point. Neighbors, teamsters, and travelers conveyed mail to and from inland towns with even less regularity, and often with less security.[1] The governmental effort to improve service by designating places of deposit and fixing fees did not secure adequate attention to mail even within port towns,[2] although the ship-post fee system was one of the main overseas mail transportation arrangements long after the United States Post Office became a giant among postal systems.

---

[1]Frank Norton (ed.), Journal of Hugh Finlay (Brooklyn, 1867), p. vi.

[2]J. S. Bassett, "The Virginia Planter and the London Merchant," Report of the American Historical Association, 1901, I, 571. Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1853), I, 281; V, 147, 273.

Frugality characterized expenditures for official dispatches: Virginia required planters to forward them free;[1] and Pennsylvania secured some conveyance in return for the privilege of operating a stagecoach line.[2] The official and unofficial response to messenger service begun by New York governors was insufficient to maintain it.[3] Merchant individualism and jealousy of outside control even checked improvement of the Colonial post founded by Thomas Neale of the British Treasury under a royal grant of 1692. The New England and Middle colonies fixed rates and granted money for the dispatch of official mail, but some did not require free ferry service for post riders,[4] and New York exempted from the postal monopoly the most desirable territory, the Hudson River and Long Island Sound.[5] Maryland disregarded the subsidy proposals of Andrew Hamilton, Neale's agent in the colonies,[6] and Virginia not only required heavy penalties for service failures but permitted merchants' letters to pass outside the post.[7] The post contributed to Neale's bankruptcy, for although letters multiplied the revenues failed to pay expenses.[8]

---

[1]W. W. Hening (ed.), Statutes at Large of Virginia (Philadelphia, 1823), I, 436; II, 109.

[2]J. F. Watson, Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania (Revised ed.; Philadelphia, 1870), II, 391-92.

[3]E. B. O'Callaghan (ed.), Documents Relating to the Colonial History of New York (Albany, New York, 1868), III, 349-50, 355-56, 682.

[4]Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections (3rd series; Boston, 1838), VII, 50-51, 64.

[5]H. R. McIlvaine (ed.), Executive Journals, Council of Colonial Virginia (Richmond, Virginia, 1925), I, 303-4.

[6]William Smith, History of the Post Office in British North America, 1639-1870 (Cambridge, England, 1920), p. 13.

[7]Hening, op. cit., III, 112-14.

[8]Great Britain: Public Record Office, Calendar of Treasury Papers, 1697-1702 (London, 1871), p. 289.

The diverse rates set by Colonial legislatures were superseded when the Crown refused to extend the grant and took over the post.[1] Foreshadowing the American Revolution, Virginia viewed the increased rates of 1711 as encroachment by Parliament upon the taxing power of the House of Burgesses, and repeated the prohibitory service requirements.[2]

The high rates of postage restricted service to government dispatches and the business and social correspondence of the educated and wealthy aristocracy, so the post office served few people and gave direct connections to few towns. Neighbors and travelers brought many letters to post offices, but their services were not so available for delivery, because people believed that a direct financial incentive was necessary to secure faithful postal service, and prepaid little postage. As for decades there was no special newspaper rate, publishers either hired the post riders to convey their papers, or secured free circulation from postal officials. There was complaint that some publisher-postmasters discriminated against their rival editors, and Franklin, who had experienced such treatment, fixed a rate for newspapers.[3] Eventually the post office was transformed from a sleepy, snail-like institution clinging to the pay-as-you-go policies of treasury officials, into an agency that diffused the opinions of Colonial leaders and developed a consciousness of common interests among the people of the various colonies.

---

[1]Herbert Joyce, History of the Post Office (London, England, 1893), p. 116.

[2]Great Britain: Public Record Office, Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies, 1717-1718 (London, England, 1930), pp. 275-76. William Smith, op. cit., p. 14.

[3]Gardner G. Hubbard, "Our Post Office," Atlantic Monthly, XXXV, 90. Jared Sparks, Works of Benjamin Franklin (Boston, 1840), I, 131.

The Colonial Post Office for several decades possessed a single line of routes from what now is Maine to Maryland, which riders or coaches traveled no more often than once a week.[1] The Crown required the post to be self-supporting, so in half a century service was extended no further south than Virginia.[2] In the meantime, immigration, natural increase of population, and intercolonial and foreign trade multiplied social contacts and the demand for postal service. Benjamin Franklin, who had been postmaster of Philadelphia and secretary of the post for more than a score of years, then took charge of the system. His associates as deputy postmaster general in the colonies shared his postal and publishing experience,[3] and they so extended offices and routes and increased service that the post office, to the amazement of London officials, returned a net profit several years later, and continued to earn an increasing amount until the Colonial hostility to Great Britain set ablaze by acts of Parliament concerning commerce and taxation was concentrated on the post office, which British officials also believed established precedents for British financial control.[4] The "Sons of Liberty" interfered with delivery of shipmasters' bags of letters to port collectors and postmasters during the Stamp Act agitation,[5] and a decade later Franklin's dismissal was the signal for a boycott and seizure of the mail, forcing royal officials to suspend

---

[1] Calendar of Treasury Papers, 1697-1702, p. 289.

[2] Watson, op. cit., II, 392.

[3] Sparks, op. cit., I, 174.

[4] A. H. Smyth, Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1905-1907), VI, 191-92; X, 176. Sparks, loc. cit.

[5] W. C. Ford, "Letters of James Parker to Franklin," Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society (2nd series, Boston, 1902), XVI, 211, 217.

inland service.[1] The field was left to the "Constitutional" offices established by Revolutionary committees, which, under Franklin's leadership, were merged by the Continental Congress into the United States Post Office a year before independence was declared.[2]

The post office followed the fortunes of war, expansion, and transportation. Throughout the Revolutionary War the United States Post Office was a feeble institution. Business and social institutions were so disrupted that no attempt was made to duplicate the service given by the Colonial Post Office; and there was little except official correspondence. The Continental currency increased postal troubles, for while rates were increased several times they failed to keep pace with paper currency depreciation and postal expenditures.[3]

Peace brought the post office back to its normal function. The war-time debt was paid, cross-routes were established to many towns of the piedmont and even over the mountains to Pittsburgh; and mails over all the "Great Post Road" from Maine to Georgia were transported by stagecoaches to assure facilities for travelers,[4] a policy of making the postal system a public pack-horse that has been applied frequently.

Institutional change brought a different program despite devotion to traditional British postal policies. With adoption of the Constitution, the post office passed from an era of small

---

[1]Peter Force and M. St. Claire Clarke, American Archives (4th series, Washington, 1837-1852), II, 481-82; IV, 453.

[2]Journals of the American Congress (Washington: Way & Gideon, 1823), I, 124.

[3]Ibid., III, 417. W. C. Ford, Journals of the Continental Congress (Washington, 1909-1910), XIII, 1456; XVI, 413-14.

[4]Journals of the American Congress, IV, 693-94.

things to one of large accomplishments, and from seaboard to continental service. From the leadership of former colonial governors and other prominent men who became postal professionals from their long terms in office, it eventually passed under control of party campaign managers whose tenure varied with the frequent shifts of party rule.

Under the strong government set up under the Constitution the post office reacted differently to public wants than did either the poverty-stricken office of the Confederation or the agency controlled by officers responsible to a distant Parliament and Crown. Rates, methods of transportation, and postal objectives remained nearly the same for several decades, but widespread public pressure expressed through congressmen succeeded the personal requests of governmental favorites, and routes were quickly established throughout the settled portions of the national domain when the financial future of the nation appeared assured. There was some sectional jealousy over the apportionment of offices and routes, but everyone wanted mail connections with distant places. Sharp differences of opinion arose over ship subsidies and overland routes,[1] but the post office was expected to develop the national domain and to mould a united democratic sentiment. So, in the public aid for highways, canals, and railroads, improved postal service was one of the chief objectives. With the land boom that followed adoption of the Constitution, routes were opened into the Ohio Valley and along Indian trails to New Orleans.[2] The first forty years of the new

---

[1] 36th Congress, 1st session, Senate Executive Document 2, pp. 1412, 1437.

[2] American State Papers: Post Office (Washington, 1834), No. 11, p. 28. W. E. Rich, History of the United States Post Office to the year 1829 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1924), pp. 72-74.

order saw a fine network of routes established in the East, the Northwest Territory, the South, and across the Mississippi River. Post offices and routes followed the advance of the pioneer farmer and merchant, however; and only in areas between the major settlements did postal service precede store and farm.

The simple horse conveyances---horseback, gig, or light wagon---by which mail was conveyed into newly-settled regions were less expensive than the stagecoach, and more adaptable to frontier trails. Passengers and their luggage sometimes crowded the mails off stagecoaches,[1] but coach service was urged by travelers, local boosters, and contractors. Just as the railroad was being introduced, fast horse service was developed to carry the news of Washington and New Orleans that dominated the New York speculative markets.[2]

The railroad brought a slow revolution in postal service. Great in future promise, railroad postal service at first was slow and irregular. The early railway lines were short and unconnected, the schedules included only daytime trips, and wrecks and stoppages were frequent.[3] Night stagecoaches gave better service on many routes until short rail lines were consolidated or trains made night trips. However, trains handled without difficulty the increased weight of mail. Despite acceptance of public and private gifts, and use of the public power of eminent domain to secure rights of way, the railroads long refused to recognize any duty to transport the mails; and they usually asked compensation equal to or greater than the price of stagecoach

---

[1] 48th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 40, p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 12. 25th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 115. United States Post Office Reports, 1826-1856 (Library of Congress), Document 2, p. 517.

[3] 26th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, p. 613.

service.[1] Government officials usually expected some savings from railroad mail transportation, and soon the companies accepted the Department's terms within the limits set by Congress, in which body railroad stockholders were well represented.[2] Railroad construction and consolidation eventually relegated horse-drawn vehicles to other routes and side service. The slavery issue and local rivalries checked arrangements for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast, but postal service in the East was readjusted to the railroad. Distributing offices were established in railway terminals, and route agents began to sort local mail in train compartments.

The land to the Pacific Ocean was secured by purchase and conquest, yet hostile Indians long dominated the great plains. The less desirable soil and scanty rainfall on both sides of the Rocky Mountains checked settlement by farmers and small ranchers, but the fertile valleys of Oregon, Washington, and California drew wagon trains of settlers; and the discovery of gold in California brought in hordes of prospectors and adventurers. The Pacific Coast also was prized for the Oriental, whaling, and fur trades which its ports facilitated; while officials deemed regular, speedy communication necessary for defense and civil organization. Accordingly, more than half a dozen post routes to California and the Oregon country, overland and by sea, were set in operation within the fifteen years between the War with Mexico and the Civil War.[3] Interest within the United States in Central American isthmian canal routes dates from the years that mails to and from the Far West were transported between ships on

---

[1] 48th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 40, pp. 36-37.

[2] Congressional Globe, XLVI, 1129, 1157, 1565, 1570.

[3] 36th Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 2, p. 1408.

the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.[1] Coastal mails traveled across seas and isthmus slightly faster than by stagecoach overland, but the Pony Express carried letters and messages in two-thirds the sea time until it disappeared with completion of the overland telegraph line.[2]

Isolation of the United States from European politics and devotion to rounding out and settling the continental domain lessened interest in foreign mail service, but growing foreign trade and immigration increased attention to and desire for overseas postal connections. For half a century after 1789, the British packet service was the only government-operated sea post to and from the United States.[3] Vessels of war carried some domestic and foreign mail bags,[4] but merchant vessels were the chief dependence, shipmasters accepting mails from post offices just as they long had done from individuals.[5]

International steamship rivalry brought foreign mail subsidies. In 1840 Great Britain abandoned its sailing packets to New York and chose to subsidize Cunard Line steamships to Boston;[6] and the United States countered with generous mail contracts for service by domestic ships to English and North European ports.[7]

---

[1]31st Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Misc. Doc. 20, p. 2. 32nd Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 50, p. 1. 34th Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 62, p. 23.

[2]L. R. Hafen, The Overland Mail, 1849-1869 (Cleveland, 1926), pp. 231, 237.

[3]27th Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, p. 452. 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, pp. 632-33.

[4]Act of June 27, 1848, 9 U. S. Statutes at Large 241.

[5]Ibid., I, 359, 735; II, 596.

[6]27th Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, p. 452. 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, pp. 632-33.

[7]34th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, p. 337. 34th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, p. 778.

Both Great Britain and the United States sent most of their mails by ships flying their own flag,[1] so the public received less rather than more service, although the development of steamships gave speedier and more regular transportation and delivery.

Complete and definite arrangements for exchange and transmission of foreign mails were made very late. A postal convention was made with Canada during Washington's first administration,[2] but five decades passed before treaties were made with the free city of Bremen, with New Grenada (Colombia), France, Great Britain, and with Prussia that assured passage of United States mail to many parts of the earth.[3]

Business interests forced postage reduction. The revolution in mail transportation provoked a postage rebellion. The traditional rate structure was intended to enable the post office to earn a profit. Postage increased rapidly with the distance matter was sent, just as the cost of horse transportation varied roughly with mileage. In the separate city posts, which covered small areas and handled large quantities of mail, transportation cost was a small item, and flat rates reduced handling costs by minimizing the labor of calculating postage. High postage perhaps deterred use of the mails by the poor somewhat less than illiteracy, but merchants and intellectuals raised much complaint; and many were the subterfuges practiced to reduce or evade postage.

Growth of population, construction of highways and railroads, increasing literacy with public education and growth of newspaper circulation, and expanding intersectional trade both

---

[1] 33rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, pp. 632-33. 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, p. 124.

[2] William Smith, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

[3] 30th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 5. United States Statutes, IX, 965; XII, 1117; XVI, 871, 963.

increased the bulk of mail and decreased unit transportation costs. The railroad made possible fast transportation for large loads at low costs, and the growth of cities and towns also increased the amount of business and personal correspondence. Merchants and publishers urged greatly reduced rates,[1] and public meetings encouraged the express companies to "bootleg" letters between the cities until the post office should reduce rates.[2] Express officials sometimes claimed that subordinates took letters against their explicit instructions,[3] but the public assumed that the companies deliberately violated the law.

Rowland Hill's advocacy and development in Great Britain of penny postage, in the expectation that the letters mailed would so increase that the different transportation costs of individual letters might be disregarded, attracted attention wherever there was discontent over postage.[4] Except between a few large cities, transportation conditions in the United States admittedly were greatly different from those of densely populated European countries; but merchants and their spokesmen stressed the similarities,[5] and patronized the express companies so much that Congress fixed two reduced rates for the entire nation as a means of regaining public support for the post office,[6] despite fears held by postal officials and congressmen that net revenues

---

[1]Pliny Miles, Postal Reform (New York, 1855), pp. viii-ix, 148ff.

[2]A. L. Stimson, History of the Express Companies (New York, 1858), pp. 148-52.

[3]28th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 483, p. 3.

[4]A. D. Smith, The Development of Rates of Postage (London, England, 1917), p. 311.

[5]28th Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 165. Miles, loc. cit.

[6]Congressional Globe, XIV, 261, 264. 28th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 483, p. 7.

would be decreased.[1]

Periodical publishers several times won important postage concessions, dinning into the ears of legislators the idea that newspapers were organs of public information and of popular education.[2] When letter postage was reduced in 1845, weekly papers sent within their county won the free circulation that some early Colonial papers had enjoyed.[3] The rural conviction that urban life contributed to corrupt politics, unwholesome social life, and individual dishonesty and immorality, but that the country was wholesome and regenerative to men's bodies and souls,[4] perpetuated the old rates for city newspapers. As the number and type of papers and the frequency of their issues increased, the newspaper rate structure also became more complex. Postage appeared more burdensome when many papers and magazines were dispatched long distances,[5] but the postal deficit made Congress cautious in accepting the publishers' claims; and newspaper postage differentials remained until after uniform letter postage was adopted.

Editors and other low postage advocates constantly attacked the franking privilege in an effort to show that abolition of free mailing would permit reduced postage and a balanced postal budget. If money were appropriated to pay the postage of government departments and of Congress, it was believed that the

---

[1] Niles National Register, LXVII, 373. 28th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 477, pp. 5-6.

[2] A. D. Smith, op. cit., p. 150. 22nd Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 106. 25th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Docs. 183 & 213.

[3] 28th Cong., 1st sess., House Reports 477, p. 14; 483, p. 4. 5 United States Statutes at Large 733, sec. 2.

[4] 22nd Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 147, pp. 1-2.

[5] 32nd Cong., 1st sess., House Report 149, pp. 1-2.

public would insist that official expenditures be small.[1] The congressional self-denial of franking in 1845 was short-lived, however. Substitution of "penalty" envelopes for administrative mail removed many abuses, but congressmen continued to enjoy free mailing for most of their needs;[2] and franking was continued for former Presidents of the United States and their widows.[3] Postmasters valued franking beyond its true worth, and it soon was restored to those of the smaller offices,[4] although their use of it was disproportionate to their commissions on postage.[5]

Management of the expanded postal system was not well in hand. Postal administration was centralized slowly. Colonial postmasters had been allotted sums to hire riders and drivers to transport the mails.[6] During the Revolution, several surveyors were appointed to keep the mails moving over their sections of the post route.[7] The postmaster general later contracted directly with stagecoach owners and others for service over routes that were designated by the Congress of the Confederation, but on some frontier routes the entire revenue was allowed persons who undertook to give regular postal service.[8]

With the nineteenth century the sense of responsibility

---

[1]28th Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 165; House Rep. 477, p. 10.

[2]9 Statutes 148, sec. 4.

[3]Ibid., p. 739.

[4]American State Papers: Post Office, No. 41, p. 41. 5 Statutes 734-35, sec. 6.

[5]29th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 1, p. 684. 9 Statutes 153, sec. 1.

[6]C. W. Ernst, "Beginnings of North American Posts," L 'Union Postale, XX, 6. Norton, op. cit., passim.

[7]Rich, op. cit., p. 51. Journals of the American Congress, II, 294.

[8]Ibid., IV, 693-94, 721-22, 543, 567.

for public funds was more keenly developed, but their administration still was attended by public scandals. Favoritism was perennial, and transportation and supply contracts became the spoils of party henchmen. Elaborate "straw bid" technique was developed to prevent contracting with the lowest bidder, and service was increased or faked to multiply contractors profits.[1] Officials purchased mail bags of politician-manufacturers without competitive bidding or numerical limit, and when the post office already was paying storage charges on a large supply.[2] Partisan editors were paid for printing trivial postal news items,[3] and some of them won transportation contracts on many post routes, which they in turn let out to sub-contractors.[4]

Postmasters retained considerable opportunity for initiative, as is shown in two social issues fought out in the half century prior to the Civil War. The great religious revival early in the nineteenth century brought petitions asking that mail delivery and transportation be prohibited on Sunday, the "Christian Sabbath." Postal officials replied that postmasters were required by law to arrange a Sunday delivery at a time other than the hours of religious services; state legislatures objected to any interference with mail transportation; and mass-meetings, as at Tammany Hall, denounced intermingling of government and religion.[5] The secular forces were more influential with Congress, and in two decades Sunday mails were no public issue.

---

[1] 23rd Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 422, pp. 33-34; 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 86, pp. 23, 35, 101-2; House Report 103, p. 75.

[2] 27th Cong., 2nd sess., House Report 989, pp. 6-7, 37-38.

[3] 28th Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 198.

[4] 23rd Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Doc. 422, pp. 33-34.

[5] American State Papers: P. O., pp. 45-47, 260-62, 357, 211-12, 231, 226-29, 240-41. 20th Cong, 2nd sess, Sen. Doc. 64.

Anti-slavery newspapers, pamphlets, and almanacs of abolitionist societies violently re-opened the slavery question a generation before the Civil War. Postmasters, especially in the South, in 1834 not only refused to deliver the papers, but removed from mail sacks those for more distant offices, claiming that their action was necessary to preserve order,[1] as if the papers were red rags and the people the traditional infuriated bull. Pro-slavery statesmen explained that possession of such matter was forbidden by their state laws, so its enforced delivery by postmasters would violate state constitutional rights.[2] President Jackson asked exclusion from the mails of matter that was intended to incite the slaves to insurrection,[3] and a special Senate committee composed largely of slave state members then presented a bill to exclude matter destined for states which outlawed it.[4] The Senate rejected decisively a substitute bill that would have prohibited only delivery,[5] but from the arguments in the preceding debate no one could be certain whether the vote represented attitudes toward slavery or views regarding Federal and state constitutional powers. Down to the Civil War, postal officials continued to allow Southern postmasters to refuse to deliver matter objectionable to them; and in 1857 the Attorney General avoided a direct ruling on their acts by stating that only a court decision could determine if they violated Federal laws.[6]

---

[1] 24th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, pp. 397-98.

[2] Congressional Debates, Vol. XII, Part 2, pp. 1725-29.

[3] 24th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, p. 26.

[4] Cong. Debates, Vol. XII, Part 2, pp. 26, 34, 1721-22.

[5] Ibid., pp. 1731, 1721-22, 1727-29.

[6] 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Report 51, pp. 5-8.

Terms of service of postal officials declined after the Colonial era. Colonial deputy postmasters general averaged ten years in office despite shifts in the king's ministers, and death ended the terms of at least three: Andrew Hamilton, the founder; Elliot Benger, Franklin's predecessor; and William Hunter, who was Franklin's first associate. One term was four years, but no other in the main or Northern district was for less than eight. In marked contrast were the less than four-year average of the postmasters general of the United States between 1789 and 1861, and less than two and one-half years between 1829 and 1861. Franklin served twenty-one years and John Hamilton eighteen in the Colonial Post Office, but in the United States Post Office the longest terms were the thirteen years of Gideon Granger and the nine of Return J. Meigs, both of whom served before 1824. Capable persons might easily and quickly become familiar with the simple Colonial postal operations in a few hours, yet the deputy postmasters general were men of importance and several had previous postal experience. Party influence came to characterize postmasters general of the United States Post Office.

Collection of revenue long vexed administrators. The scarcity of coins, the different currencies in use, and absence of postage stamps often necessitated postmasters giving credit, and caused loss of considerable postage to both the Colonial and the United States Post Offices.[1] In the eighteen thirties, a number of postmasters refused to pay the balances they owed, and suits were necessary to force compliance.[2] On the eve of the Civil War, the postmaster of New York absconded with a large sum,

---

[1]Norton, op. cit., passim. American State Papers: Post Office, No. 106, p. 277.

[2]Ibid., No. 109, pp. 315-16.

and a Federal court upheld a claimed secret agreement between the postmaster and his bondsmen to prevent recovery from them,[1] Colonial officials often intermingled personal and postal funds,[2] and the Post Office Department as late as 1816 transferred funds for congressmen,[3] while later it borrowed money from contractors.[4] Departmental accounting difficulties under President Jackson led to creation of an independent audit,[5] and the reliance upon an outside auditor contributed to prevent any approach to cost accounting within the Department for more than eighty years.

Tremendously changes as was the United States Post Office between Colonial days and the Civil War, its transition from what one may term the natural to the mechanical age of transportation appears slow to present-day observers. Distribution of mail aboard railway cars, as in England in 1840, was then deemed impossible in the United States on account of unballasted roadbeds and swaying cars.[6] Low and uniform postage was believed to be practical only in a system in which transportation was a minor cost element.[7] Postal savings banks were general in Europe generations before pioneer individualism and a powerful banking interest in the United States gave way to postal depositories. Reminiscent of American individualism, too, was the slow post office acceptance of responsibility for collection and delivery of mail at homes, stores, factories, and farms. Eventually,

---

[1] 36th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, p. 447.

[2] Sparks, op. cit., I, 174. Joyce, op. cit., p. 116.

[3] 14th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 77, pp. 2-3.

[4] 23rd Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 422, p. 32.

[5] Ibid. 5 United States Statutes 81-83.

[6] 26th Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, pp. 493-94.

[7] 28th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 477, pp. 5-6.

however, the post office was transformed to utilize the railroad more effectively, and also to satisfy the demands of the city, of farmers long conscious of exploitation and deprivation, of the labor movement, and of the public at large, in recognition of the increasing responsibility of the state for the economic welfare of the citizen.

The Civil War saw the beginning of a new postal era. Conflict over slavery and secession accentuated postal development, just as it hastened industrial and commercial change by confirming the shift of power from the slave plantation to the factories and stores of the North and East. The smaller offices and the older and slower means of transportation were in the Confederate states. The major portions of the population, land and other natural resources, the larger cities, the factories, the railroads, and other forms of wealth---slaves excepted---were within Union areas. Secession strengthened the finances of the post office by suspending operation of unprofitable units, and made possible the remarkable war-time improvements.

Before the clash of arms, Union postal officials had sought to restore the Southern postal service which their predecessors already had discontinued. Southerners objected, however, and when the Confederate Post Office took charge, Federal service ceased in all the seceding states except the Union portions of Virginia and Tennessee.[1] Late in August, 1861, the Federal ban on all communication and trade made the sectional break complete.[2]

Union leaders were determined to maintain speedy

---

[1] 37th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 4. John H. Reagan, Memoirs (New York, 1906), pp. 128, 130-33.

[2] Chicago Tribune, August 26, 1926, p. 8, "65 Years ago Today" column. The ban applied only to the "seceding" states.

communication with the Far West, upon which Confederate eyes were cast. The main overland postal route to California had been through Texas, so Federal officials quickly shifted mails to the central route, increased service to daily trips, gave Denver and Salt Lake City added mails, and utilized the Pony Express until the overland telegraph line was completed late in 1861.[1] Indian attacks and guerilla raids interrupted the Western mail schedule at times;[2] while the ocean service to the Pacific Coast was uninterrupted, although when Congress restricted compensation for that transportation to the postage on the mails carried, steamship companies threatened to leave mails behind, and consented to take them only when officials promised to intercede for additional payments.[3] Further compensation was allowed,[4] but Congress required all vessels of United States registry to carry the mails as a condition of receiving clearance papers.[5]

The conveyance of mails to and from the armies during the Civil War was a task mainly in developing flexibility of movement for mail wagons and the sorting of mail in railway cars at army headquarters or railway terminals. Within the armies, enlisted men and officers from the quartermaster department delivered and collected mail by regiments and companies.[6]

---

[1] 12 Statutes 206, secs. 9-11. 37th Cong., 3rd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. IV, p. 560.

[2] 37th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. III, pp. 560-61. 47th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Report 403, pp. 1-2.

[3] 36th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 99; 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 434.

[4] 12 Statutes 205, sec. 6.

[5] 13 Stat. 36. 37th Cong., 2nd sess., House Misc. Doc. 52.

[6] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1898, p. 216. Madison Davis, "The Public Career of Montgomery Blair," Records of the Columbia Historical Society (Washington, 1910), pp. 137-38, 158.

When at last peace came to the blood-stained South, only those post offices and routes which officials deemed necessary to the people's reasonable needs were re-established.[1] Collection of the sums due the post office awaited the re-establishment of Federal courts. Postmasters who had been loyal to the Union and were able to give bond were difficult to find, especially as public opinion in the South was inflamed against the policies of reconstruction.[2] The ban upon the employment of colored persons in the postal service that had existed since 1802 passed away;[3] and the intimidation of postal employees of Northern sympathies also ceased with the ending of "reconstruction."[4]

The post office which emerged from the bitter war found itself in a new era. The changes are traceable in earlier events, but only as the smoke of conflict lifted was the drift plain. Transportation, delivery, rates and service, and tenure of postal employees bore marks of the transition from the age of the horse, of rural ascendency, complex rates and simple service, and political spoils, to an age of mechanical transportation, dominance of the city, simple rates and a multitude of postal services, civil service rules, and the organization of labor.

Postal transportation kept pace with mechanical vehicles. The sphere of horse-drawn vehicles in the postal service shrunk rapidly before the railroad, although the length of horse routes, the trips with mail, and the dispatches of matter over them increased steadily up to 1900. Before 1860 the railroad was

---

[1] 66th Cong., 3rd sess., Sen. Doc. 422, p. 124.

[2] 39th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 81; Sen. Ex. Doc. 34, p. 1.

[3] Statutes, II, 191; XIII, 515.

[4] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1876, p. xxxvi.

limited much as the airplane is today. But with night trains, a large railway network, post office cars, and special mail trains, the railroad won so decisively that for two generations it was the arterial basis of all land postal operations. The horse henceforth had a role only in the side and transfer service, or in mountainous regions where the railroad had not penetrated. Mail distribution shifted from terminal post offices to railway cars, and when the railway mail service mastered the sorting of mail by rail and star routes and post offices it began city distribution by carrier routes.

The railway postal car brought hazardous and nerve-racking work to postal clerks. They assumed the risks of wrecks, swaying trains, and night work by dim light for nearly two generations before the government provided compensation for clerks' injuries and insurance for the families of those killed on duty.[1] A long and vigorous agitation against wooden postal cars also was necessary before they were removed from steel trains.[2] In the meantime, improved brakes, block systems, and double tracks contributed to reduce the number of wrecks. The railroads won payment for postal cars and some special mail trains, but multiplication of railroad lines, increased traffic, a lower price level, and reduced costs of railroad operations developed agitation for lower freight and passenger rates; and the rates of pay for mail transportation were reduced three times between 1872 and 1907.[3] In 1916 Congress authorized compensation according to space instead of by assumed weight, but left settlement of the entire

---

[1] 32 Statutes 115.

[2] Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1892, pp. 290, 507; 1901, pp. 649, 658; 1905, p. 60. 36 Statutes 1335.

[3] Statutes, XVII, 558; XX, 142; XXXIV, 1212.

railway compensation problem to the Interstate Commerce Commission.[1]

Railroad mail transportation had not long been fully developed before a new fast means of transportation appeared. Following generations of free ballooning, Orville and Wilbur Wright in 1903 successfully flew a heavier than air machine; and reckless young men soon undertook short flights, at times with small amounts of mail. Postal officials, who obviously knew little of that about which they spoke, talked of air service possibilities in mountainous areas.[2] Appropriations for experimental air mails were made just before the World War.[3] Flights with mail between Washington and New York were undertaken by the War and Post Office departments in 1918,[4] but that route was discontinued the next year, when service was developed by post office planes between Chicago, Cleveland, and New York.[5] In 1920 routes were developed out of Chicago to Omaha and San Francisco, and also to St. Paul and St. Louis; while contract planes carried mail along the Atlantic Coast and west to St. Louis.[6] A lighted airway between Chicago and Cheyenne made continuous experimental air service possible in 1923;[7] and in 1924 regular day and night mail service was instituted over the transcontinental route, at special rates of postage, making a strong bid for banking

---

[1] 39 Statutes 425.

[2] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1911, p. 14.

[3] Ibid., 1914, p. 25; 1915, p. 144. 39 Statutes 418, 1064.

[4] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1918, pp. 17-18.

[5] Aircraft Yearbook (New York), 1920, p. 37; 1924, p. 34.

[6] Ibid., 1921, p. 28. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1920, p. 63.

[7] Chicago Daily News, June 24, 1924, p. 1.

and brokerage letters.[1]

Airplane manufacturers and business men clamored for private industry and a contract air mail service, handling both passengers and express; and in 1926 government service was abandoned for private enterprise. Contract compensation was not kept within the amount of air mail postage;[2] and, as postage was reduced to stimulate public use of air service, while numerous domestic and foreign routes were added, the air mail deficit mounted to seventeen million dollars in 1931.[3] Commercial aviation was greatly aided by the network of domestic routes and those to Canada and Mexico, and to Central American, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean ports; but subsidies have developed a dependent industry.

International postal unions replaced irregular foreign service. Foreign postal service was improved rapidly following the Civil War by the development of postal unions. Satisfactory exchange of mail with Canada and the countries bordering on the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea had been arranged early; but fewer ships were available to carry mails direct to many other countries, and the transit fees of relaying postal administrations usually approximated their domestic rates of postage. Exporters, importers, and immigrants urged governments to develop postal unions, and the approving statements of publicists and statesmen also stressed the spread of civilization.

Despite their possession since 1851 of authority to modify foreign postal rates and also to enter into international

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1925, pp. 30-31.

[2]Ibid., 1927, p. 7; 1929, p. 46. Statutes, XLIII, 805-6; Vol. XLIV, Part 2, pp. 692-93.

[3]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1931, p. 54.

postal agreements,[1] officials had given nearly all their attention to domestic service. Not until wholesale postal change and destruction of slavery became administration objectives did a call go forth from Postmaster General Blair in 1862 for the first general postal conference in 1863, with a view to securing uniformity in weights, postage, and transit charges; and creation of international money order and registration systems.[2] However, at the Conference of Paris, where the chief European and several other states were represented, the delegates attempted to form no general postal treaty, but set forth thirty-one general propositions involving mail classification, weights, transit charges, and accounts between postal systems for action by their governments.[3] The postal conventions and treaties that followed the Conference opened the way, however, for adoption of a German plan of union at Berne in 1874. The treaties of the Universal Postal Union fixed international units of weight and postage, ordinary transit charges, and eliminated all accounting for and division of postage.[4] Nearly every civilized country joined the Union within a generation.[5]

The United States chose to make special conventions for exchange of money orders and parcels with foreign countries. The first parcels post convention, with Jamaica in 1887,[6] preceded the domestic parcels post by twenty-six years. All mail matter was exchanged with Canada on what was essentially the domestic

---

[1] 9 Statutes 589, sec. 2.

[2] 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. IV, pp. 165-68.

[3] L 'Union Postale Universelle (Berne, 1924), pp. 10-12.

[4] Ibid., pp. 24-27.

[5] Ibid., passim.

[6] 25 Statutes 1393.

basis after 1889.[1] Between 1907 and 1919 the two-cent letter rate was extended to Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and other Caribbean areas, the United Kingdom, Germany, Newfoundland, and New Zealand. Then after the World War the Pan-American Postal Union and other treaties virtually made the Western Hemisphere one postal territory.[2]

Subsidies increasingly marked foreign mail transportation. The transportation of foreign mails was vitally affected by mail contracts. A steamship line aided by Brazil was subsidized by the United States for a decade after 1864, and, like earlier subsidized lines, it ceased operations when the mail contract ended.[3] In 1872, lobbyists, after expenditure of nearly a million dollars, succeeded in getting Congress to double the half-million dollar subsidy for service between the Pacific Coast, Japan, and China; but when "Bear" speculators in the stocks of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company exposed the payments to former congressmen,[4] members-elect, and a former postmaster general, Congress ordered that the new contract be disregarded. In that era of official corruption, only the company agent was punished, and he for contempt of the House of Representatives by refusal to answer questions.[5] The House of Representatives first had rejected both the extra China and Brazil mail subsidies, while the Senate without record votes had approved both projects, and

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1889, p. xxxii.

[2]Ibid., 1907, p. 691; 1908, p. 54; 1919, p. 10; 1927, pp. 1-2, 51-52.

[3]Royal Meeker, History of Shipping Subsidies (New York, 1905), pp. 158-59.

[4]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1891, p. 23.

[5]43rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Report 268, pp. III-IV, VI, VIII, XVIII. Congressional Record, III, 292, 316; IV, 5370-71. Act of March 3, 1875, 18 Statutes 342, sec. 2.

the conference committee of the two bodies had retained them in the bill until the House a second time eliminated the Brazil subsidy,[1] for which lobbyists distributed no money.[2]

Further opposition to subsidies developed. Cut-throat competition and Chinese immigration brought denunciation in California of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.[3] The National Board of Trade in 1871 claimed that subsidies checked ship development, and urged international agreements to eliminate them.[4] Then twice in 1878 the House of Representatives declared that subsidies and grants-in-aid were contrary to public policy.[5]

But subsidy requests continued; and when in 1885 several lines refused to take the mails for the postage alone, some mails were dispatched in the name of the Mexican Post Office.[6] A combination of ship builders and shipping interests on both coasts in 1890 won a general mail contract law over the opposition of Southern and Middle West congressmen, who pointed to the contradictory policies of the tariff and subsidy advocates, the absence of need for wooden sailing vessels, the failures of past subsidies to develop a merchant marine, and the corruption that subsidies produced.[7] The contracts entered into provided mail service between New York and Venezuelan, Mexican, Cuban, and British

---

[1] Cong. Globe, XLV, 1843-46, 3178-79, 3680, 3872, 3881.

[2] 43rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Rep. 268, pp. 15-17, 19-21.

[3] 41st Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Misc. Doc. 34. Congressional Record, III, 1623-24.

[4] Report on Ocean Postal Service (Boston, 1871), pp. 1-4, 8.

[5] Congressional Record, VII, 626, 3434.

[6] 23 Statutes 58, 387. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1885, pp. 18, 21, 35, 45, 829.

[7] Congressional Record, XXII, 654-55, 999, 1002-3, 3349, 3356-63, 3470-71, 3485; 1010-11, 1046, 3346, 3385, 3469-77, 3501; Appendix, pp. 237, 262.

ports; between Boston, Philadelphia, and Jamaica; and between San Francisco, Samoa, and Australia.[1] Not until 1914 did the postage exceed the contract pay, and at the end of the year 1916 the government's loss on the contracts totaled seven and a half million dollars.[2]

Shipping interests on many occasions urged more generous subsidies,[3] and following the World War the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 empowered the Postmaster General and the United States Shipping Board to fix contract rates. Payments were limited to the annual appropriations Congress might make,[4] but foreign mail expenditures nearly doubled even before new contract routes in 1926 gave direct entry of United States mails into Brazilian, Argentinian, South African, Mediterranean, and Black Sea ports.[5] Then in 1928 ten-year contracts were authorized, and the two score routes arranged before 1932 called for payment in that time of nearly a third of a billion dollars.[6]

A long overdue development in foreign mail service was the sea post office, in which mail was distributed and sacks were tagged and forwarded direct to railway post office routes and cities from ship docks. Hours or days were saved in delivery of mail by the sea post service, which also eliminated mail congestion in port post offices. First undertaken in cooperation with the German Post Office in 1891, sea post offices later were

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1892-1916, passim.

[2]Ibid., 1916, pp. 137-38.

[3]Meeker, op. cit., pp. 170-71. 57th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Report 201, Part 1, pp. 1, 3, 6. 59th Cong., 2nd sess., House Report 6442, pp. 2, 5; House Document 553.

[4]Congressional Record, LIX, 6865-67. 41 Statutes 991-98.

[5]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1926, p. 40.

[6]Ibid., 1931, p. 30. 45 Statutes 689.

established on the American Line to Europe, on vessels to Porto Rico and the Canal Zone, and also on British and French vessels to Europe in cooperation with foreign post offices.[1] The sea post service was resumed after the World War, but without assistance from Great Britain or France. The United States vessels carrying contract mails in the Pacific also installed sea post offices.[2] The air mail offers such promise, however, that little further expansion of sea post service seems probable; and if the letter mails are dispatched by air, the sea post offices may even disappear.

Office and home mail delivery marked the new age. While great improvements in mail transportation and distribution were taking place, local postal service was being revolutionized. The old fee or "penny" post, operated in several large cities by both private and government carriers, was replaced by a free system.[3] Not only did free delivery displace the large groups of patrons' boxes from large post offices, but service several times a day to business houses and residences reduced the tiers of boxes in small cities to those of a few firms which desired access to their mail at all hours. Once free delivery was inaugurated in cities in 1863, urban residents who were farther from their post offices than a short walk petitioned and lobbied for delivery until many places below five thousand population received it.

City growth and the multiplication of vehicles as trade

---

[1] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1890, pp. 108-9; 1891, p. 1055; 1895, p. 457; 1904, p. 463; 1907, p. 39; 1912, pp. 149-50; 1914, pp. 186-88. Files, Division of Foreign Mails.

[2] Ibid. Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1923, pp. 6-8; 1926, pp. 40-41.

[3] Statutes, I, 366; V, 89; XII, 703-4. 27th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 2, pp. 762ff. 35th Cong., 1st sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 11, pp. 974-75. Congressional Globe, XXIX, 3839.

expanded delayed local mail transportation; and, as the horse proved unequal to the need for speed, mechanical means were pressed into postal service. Hope in the eighteen nineties for coordination of street car mail transportation and the collection and delivery services soon faded,[1] but great use still was expected of pneumatic tubes. Yet, except in localities where the main post offices are located where traffic is greatly congested, as in New York and Boston, the greater capacity, dependability, and flexibility of motor trucks soon left the latter without a rival in urban areas.[2]

Rural postal service, too, has changed. Farm organizations and persons interested in country life followed the pleas for lower railroad rates, Greenback inflation, free silver, and other predominately economic issues with requests for rural free delivery, which the leading European post offices had given early in the nineteenth century.[3] Soon after 1897 rural delivery routes extending from railroad towns displaced rural post offices in crossroads stores, and brought daily newspapers to boxes along country roads.[4] Experiments with two-man traveling post offices that set out from railroad towns and not only placed mail in boxes but gave regular post office service to patrons and also relayed pouches of mail to subsidiary rural carriers for delivery on side routes, begun with high hopes and carried on in several

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1891, p. 82; 1896, p. 33. James E. White, A Life Span and Reminiscences of the Railway Mail Service (Philadelphia, 1910), p. 222.

[2]56th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 289. 60th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 1220. 63rd Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 615. 65th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 191. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1931, p. 160.

[3]Congressional Record, XXVII, 151.

[4]55th Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Document 171.

areas, soon were abandoned.[1] Rural carriers gave all the service required, and even the contractors on "star" routes between railroad and inland towns were required to place mail in boxes along the way, register letters, and sell stamps and money orders. Rural carriers early used automobiles in dry weather, and as roads were hard-surfaced or otherwise improved so cars could be used a large part of the year, routes were lengthened or combined. The parcels post extended the farm families range of purchases, but the hope of its chief rural sponsors that it would increase farm income and reduce the urban cost of living by encouraging elimination of the middleman and direct relations between farm producer and city consumer soon faded.[2] The cost of rural delivery soon exceeded that of urban delivery, but, despite the attacks upon it for its cost, any great change in it is extremely improbable until the nature of country life is altered.

Low flat rates and special services renewed the postal costs issue. Postal finances after 1861 reflected the growth of population and industry and the settlement of the Far West. The policy of extending postal service to every settled portion of the nation was applied even more liberally after the Civil War; but, despite postage reductions, the degree of self-support was far greater than it had been between 1829 and 1860. The new post office service consumed a much greater---and transportation a smaller---part of the increased outlay. Group pressure for lower rates and improved and special service presented the question of allocating postal expenditures in order to determine proper rates.

Business and personal correspondence won during the Civil

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1899, p. 212; 1901, p. 113.

[2]Ibid., 1925, p. 34. 65th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 159, p. 2.

War the three-cent nation-wide rate of postage that earlier had been urged to check private letter systems.[1] When the price level dropped sharply, the basic rate was reduced to two cents a half-ounce in 1883, and to two cents an ounce in 1885.[2] The World War for a time added a cent to letter rates, and the depression that came in 1929 did the same. For "postal" cards, as distinguished from private mailing cards, an extra cent was added only during the World War.[3] The nineteenth century hope for one-cent letter postage passed quickly as the long downward trend of prices was reversed and postal costs also were greatly increased.[4]

Newspaper circulation increased with the development of transportation and public education. Advertising growth made coverage the measure of periodical financial success, and low postage made possible low subscription prices. Pound postal rates in 1874 and a basic charge of a cent a pound in 1885 rewarded the publishers continued agitation,[5] but necessitated steps to eliminate advertising sheets or works of literature masked as periodicals.[6] How to apply the distinction without affecting genuine news publications or publishers who were influential in politics baffled officials for years,[7] and only when the pressure for postal economy brought zone rates on the

---

[1] 18 Statutes 705.

[2] Ibid., XXII, 455; XXIII, 387.

[3] Ibid., XL, 327; XLIII, 1066.

[4] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1890, pp. 24, 53-55.

[5] Statutes, XVIII, 232-33; XIX, 82.

[6] Ibid., XX, 359. Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1890, pp. 26-27; 1901, pp. 16-17, 20-21.

[7] Ibid., 1907, p. 287.

advertising portions in 1917,[1] the price of print paper rose, and mechanical and labor costs mounted were the number and circulation of advertising sheets in the mails checked. The weekly newspaper retained free circulation in its county, and the publishers showed their political power in 1928, when the zone rates were so reduced that for near zones the same rate was charged on news and advertising portions.[2]

Business circulars came into prominence with cheap printing and the growth of commercial and manufacturing interests. Rates on circulars long were higher than newspaper postage, and in 1863 printed and miscellaneous matter were separated into a distinct class of mail.[3] Merchandise was made a fourth class in 1879, but after 1925 weight was the chief distinction between the third and fourth classes.[4] Originally these classes were charged a cent for two ounces and one ounce, respectively. The express companies fought efforts to reduce those rates, and even sought to double them.[5] Eventually large and heavy parcels were admitted to the mails at low rates,[6] but the extravagant claims that its advocates made for the parcels post made its record for public convenience and economy seem less notable.[7]

The franking privilege continued to draw attack, and it again was withdrawn from postmasters. Government offices and

---

[1] 40 Statutes 327-28.

[2] Ibid., XLIII, 1066-67; XLV, 940.

[3] Ibid., XII, 169-70, 705-6.

[4] Ibid., XX, 359-60; XLIII, 1053.

[5] 49th Cong., 1st sess., House Rep. 1355; Sen. Rep. 448.

[6] 37 Statutes 557.

[7] 62nd Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 379, p. 6; House Report 597, pp. 1-2, 6-8.

their cooperating agencies were restricted to "penalty" envelopes for their official mailings. Congressional free mailing was continued, but the proportion of mail that is franked appears to be much less than once was claimed.[1] The value of many government publications is questioned, but what to one person is worthless others consider vital.

Public convenience has been the goal of special postal services. Undelivered letters are returned to senders or forwarded to regional dead letter offices; and parcels are disposed of by local or other postmasters.[2] Officials suggested a special delivery system like that of Prussia, but one was established only in the eighteen eighties, when local messenger systems had begun to threaten postal revenues.[3] Requiring each person who handled registered letters to receipt for them after 1868 eliminated most registry losses,[4] which were indemnified after 1897, a result traceable to the work of the Universal Postal Union.[5] Increase of the maximum indemnity to a thousand dollars in 1928 made registration more popular for securities and other valuable business papers.[6] Money orders first were issued in 1864 in army camps,[7] then in 1868 foreign orders were added.[8] The volume of domestic orders has continued to mount, but the decrease in

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1931, p. 110.

[2]U. S. Official Postal Guide, 1924, p. 29; 1929, pp. 34f.

[3]Congressional Globe, XXXIII, 1151. 23 Statutes 387.

[4]36th Cong., 3rd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. III, Part 1, pp. 445-46. Act of March 3, 1863, 12 Statutes 706, sec. 20.

[5]54th Cong., 1st sess., House Rep. 821. 29 Stat. 599.

[6]45 Statutes 469.

[7]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1865, p. 75.

[8]15 Statutes 196-97.

immigration has halved the 1911 peak value of international orders. Competing with the banking system, money orders have been used most by those who do no banking business.

The agitation for a postal savings system met strong banking opposition, and, in the debate after 1871,[1] the suggestion evoked cries of "Federal encroachment on Business," "Paternalism," and "Communistic" from conservative Democratic editors.[2] The banking panic of 1907 re-emphasized the insecurity of bank deposits,[3] and President Taft's postal savings plan, in the vote upon which party lines were tightly drawn, was adopted in 1910.[4] The number of depositors and the total of deposits were small until bank failures after 1929 led many to shift savings to the post office.[5] The low rate of interest paid made the system so unattractive to investors that for years it was patronized chiefly by the foreign-born.[6]

A postal telegraph was a fond dream of several postmasters general from 1871 until 1921.[7] The Western Union Telegraph Company's practical monopoly, its high rates, and its failure to serve any but the most profitable territory,[8] drew protests from the public, brokers, and merchants. But officials were accused

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1873, pp. xxxiii-xxxvi.

[2]51st Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Miscellaneous Document 91, pp. 69-70, 72, 309.

[3]60th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Report 525, p. 143.

[4]Congressional Record, XLV, 2780, 7767-68.

[5]Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1931, p. 278.

[6]Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1917, p. 58; 1919, p. 91.

[7]Ibid., 1871, p. xxxvi; 1883, pp. 25-26; 1889, p. 15; 1914, p. 145; 1919, p. 23.

[8]Ibid., 1873, pp. xliv, xlvii-xlviii. 50th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Miscellaneous Document 39; House Report 955, Part 1.

of seeking means for building political oligarchies; and the public as a whole had little interest in telegraph service, and cared little what news associations and brokers had to pay. There was a powerful organization to be displaced or bought, too, and a great bogey was made of government industry.

Fixation of postal rates always has involved consideration of postal costs. When letters were the only class of mail matter, the problem was to choose between rates that would produce the heaviest mailings and those that would bring the largest net revenue. Allocation of revenues to main and branch routes presented relatively simple problems when offices and routes were few; but as routes grew into networks and several classes of mail were established the difficulties rose. The amount of mail received tended to be equal to that sent only in the case of personal and of non-advertising business correspondence. Newspapers, magazines, advertising matter, and parcels post moved opposite a one-way letter mail. Counting and weighing every piece of mail on every route and in offices would cost far more than current expenditures, so approximate results were sought from statistical sampling---from data representative of each post office and route for a typical period. The cost studies begun in 1923 included countings and weighings at all the large offices and selected smaller offices, as well as on post routes.[1] The period chosen may have been too short or otherwise unrepresentative of the business of some offices, and many offices may have been unrepresentative of their class, for parts of the data conflicted with those of earlier longer periods.[2] The studies have

---

[1] "Cost of Handling Mail Matter," 68th Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Document 162 (Washington, 1924), Part I, passim.

[2] Congressional Record, LXVI, 3406-7.

not assumed priority in types of mail matter and of services, but were mathematical analyses that must in effect be weighted to have practical value. National policy has called for prior attention and also lower rates for certain matter and services. There is need for detailed data showing how much each element of service adds to the costs of each type of matter or postal service, revealing what elements are equated by current rates of postage. Intensive and frequent service has been due largely to certain matter rather than to all types of mail.

The labor problem came with a necessary postal bureaucracy. Intensive settlement of the Middle and Far West multiplied post offices and increased the number of persons engaged in postal activity from about fifty thousand in 1875 to more than three hundred and fifty thousand in 1930.[1]

Dissatisfaction with the custom of appointing and dismissing postal employees as the fortunes of political parties and factions rose and fell grew as the new Republican party continued the spoils tradition cultivated by Andrew Jackson. Postal clerks and carriers were drawn from those who had contributed votes to political organizations; while drunkenness, absence from duty, and mishandling of mail were common.[2] Postmaster General Blair in 1862 longed for the professional permanent personnel of the British Post Office, and civil service reformers looked to Great Britain for precedents.[3] President Grant appointed the first civil service commission for Federal service, but he failed to uphold its high principles and complaisantly allowed it to die

---

[1] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1876, p. xii. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1931, p. 168.

[2] 46th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 94, pp. 39-40.

[3] 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. IV, pp. 141-42. 43rd Cong., 1st sess., Senate Ex. Doc. 53, pp. 29ff.

from lack of funds.[1] Finally, President Garfield's assassination by a crazed office-seeker brought the Civil Service Law of 1883, a new commission, and technical examinations.[2] Then, until the nation became accustomed to the new patronage, each party complained when its opponents came into office, found positions filled by members of the opposition, and sought technical grounds for replacing them with its own members. Outgoing administrations tried to give permanent tenure to incumbents in certain positions without an examination, but incoming officials usually ordered examinations for those positions.[3]

Efficiency ratings were fought by the employees, often with justice, as they sometimes were used merely to keep salaries low. Despite legislation preventing removals for employee organization membership, Postmaster General Burleson dismissed organization leaders who opposed his policies.[4] The employees have desired an appeal board, but the Department and Congress have not followed municipalities and states in creating such civil service bodies.[5] The civil service machinery has thus been a means of choosing the political favorites who have ability for appointment to government positions with life tenure.

The transportation revolution that transformed modern

---

[1]"A Chapter in the History of the Civil Service," Nation, XII, 41-43. C. R. Fish, The Civil Service and the Patronage (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1905), p. 213. 43rd Cong., 2nd sess., House Executive Document 1, Part 1, p. xix.

[2]47th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Report 576, pp. Iff.

[3]Fish, op. cit., p. 222. 66th Cong., 3rd sess., Senate Document 422, pp. 15-16, 23. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1931, p. 169.

[4]62nd Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Document 548. William Hard, "Mr. Burleson, Junker in Vain," New Republic, XVIII, 370-71.

[5]67th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 288, Part 1, p. 2. Union Postal Clerk, September, 1925, p. 3.

postal systems was only a part of the industrial revolution which brought into the markets a flood of goods that made possible a comfort which earlier ages had not known. The greater power of society's productive mechanism led the industrial workers to demand a share in that prosperity. Salaries of Department clerks were increased during the Civil War, and in 1866 Postmaster General Randall stated not only that the field service employees deserved a fair and living wage, but that the government could well afford it.[1]

In the new Railway Mail Service, the study, the strenuous labor, and the risks involved, led officials to formulate a salary schedule that was more liberal than that of the route agents, the mail messengers, and others in the postal service.[2] Prices declined after the Civil War, and railway postal clerks' salaries were reduced in 1876 against the desire of officials.[3] Postal car work continued to make increasing mental and physical demands,[4] and when prices rose Congress increased the clerks' salaries in 1907 and in 1912, and allowed sums for expenses away from home. Economy-minded officials denied or delayed promotions,[5] but the boom prices of the World War period forced new increases to meet the doubled cost of living between 1913 and 1920.[6] Then with the depression after 1929 came reduction in pay.

---

[1] 32nd Cong., 2nd sess., House Ex. Doc. 1, "Postmaster General's Report," pp. 15-16.

[2] 48th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Ex. Doc. 40, p. 99. 13 Statutes 506.

[3] 66th Cong., 3rd sess., Sen. Doc. 422, p. 68. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1876, p. 161.

[4] 54th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 739, pp. 3-5.

[5] Statutes, XXXIV, 1212-13; XXXVII, 555-56.

[6] Ibid., XXXVI, 298; XLI, 1050; XLIII, 1055-56. Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1914, p. 71; 1916, p. 66.

Out of lump-sum allowances, postmasters paid post office clerks and letter carriers such amounts as they saw fit in view of local wage scales and the individuals concerned.[1] The letter carriers won from Congress minimum salaries in 1879 and in 1882, and the clerks gained the same in 1889;[2] but both continued to urge higher pay. Postmaster General Burleson stated in 1917 that the postal employees received three times the soldiers' pay and shared none of their hardships and risk,[3] but Congress bore in mind the heavier mails and the burden of supporting a family amid the high war-time prices; and then in 1925 it sought to give the postal employees a share in the prosperity of the post-war boom.[4] But with the depression after 1929 most of the latest gains were lost, although the purchasing power of salaries remained high.

Life tenure and hours agitation by labor unions set letter-carrier Knights of Labor groups in several large cities to secure an eight hour law when the Federal statute for "laborers, workmen, or mechanics" was denied application to postal work.[5] A brief electoral and lobbying effort sufficed to win a basic eight hour law, with payment for overtime;[6] but officials interpreted it as a weekly hours law, and several million dollars overtime claims were allowed by Federal courts and were paid by Congress.[7]

---

[1]Sterling D. Spero, The Labor Movement in a Government Industry: A Study of Employee Organization in the Postal Service (New York, 1924), p. 59.

[2]Statutes, XX, 317; XXV, 643.

[3]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1917, p. 33.

[4]Statutes, XLI, 1050-52; XLIII, 1059.

[5]Ibid., XV, 77. 49th Cong., 1st sess., House Ex. Doc. 71.

[6]25 Statutes 157. Spero, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

[7]66th Cong., 3rd sess., Senate Document 422, p. 57. 57th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 1316. 148 U. S. Reports 124-33.

The Department then prohibited overtime and secured a weekly hours law, but became discontented with it when carriers used it to secure a Saturday afternoon holiday.[1]

The post office clerks also sought limitation of hours. By 1904, an eight-hour schedule was generally in force, but split tricks extended the work of many clerks over ten or even thirteen hours.[2] Joining forces, the clerks and carriers in 1912 won an eight-in-ten hour daily schedule, with time off for Sunday work and pay for other overtime.[3] Following the World War, however, the regular employees were worked overtime because pay for it was less than that for regular service, until President Harding upheld the employees' plea.[4]

Organized labor set the five-day week and forty-hour week as an immediate objective during the post-war boom; and the post office clerks, whose work was performed chiefly at night, in 1928 won increased pay for night work, but over a presidential veto.[5] In 1931, in the midst of the depression, the forty-four hour week was applied to the entire postal service;[6] yet as many post offices and stations were closed early on Saturday afternoons, increased employment was not the general result.

The increasing nervous strain of modern postal work made leaves with pay a great boon to postal employees. Those in the Department at Washington long enjoyed thirty days vacation with

---

[1] 57th Cong., 1st sess., House Rep. 1316. Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1893, pp. xiv-xv; 1895, pp. 19, 123-25.

[2] Ibid., 1904, p. 6; 1907, p. 109. Spero, op. cit., pp. 178-79. 51st Cong., 1st sess., House Report 2606.

[3] 37 Statutes 554-55.

[4] Spero, op. cit., pp. 264-65.

[5] 45 Statutes 725.

[6] Ibid., XLVI, 1164-65.

pay. Some postmasters allowed three letter carriers to serve four routes for a time, so all might have short vacations, but the Department forbade the arrangement when carriers in other cities sought similar privileges.[1] The carriers then urged a vacation law, and the measured passed by Congress in 1884 allowed fifteen days.[2] The post office clerks also asked thirty-day vacations, and won a fifteen-day law in 1890.[3] Railway postal clerks gained similar legislation in 1899,[4] and in 1916 those in the railway mail service ineligible for leave with pay might employ substitutes for thirty days.[5] Rural carriers in 1907 secured fifteen-day vacations with pay,[6] while the employees in the mail bag repair shop enjoyed fifteen days after 1890, and after 1912 the thirty-day Department allowance.[7]

Departmental employees in 1893 were permitted up to sixty days leave without pay in cases of illness.[8] In 1907, railway postal clerks,[9] and in 1916 other postal employees were allowed up to one year leave without pay for similar reasons.[10] Ten-day annual sick leave with pay was granted in 1920.[11] After 1925 the sick leave might cumulate without limit instead of being

---

[1] Spero, op. cit., p. 63.

[2] 23 Statutes 60.

[3] Ibid., XXVI, 648-49.

[4] Ibid., XXX, 962-64.

[5] Ibid., XXXVII, 798.

[6] Ibid., XXXIV, 1215.

[7] Ibid., XXVI, 648-49; XXXVI, 1336; XXXVII, 546.

[8] Ibid., XXVII, 715; XXX, 316-17.

[9] Ibid., XXXIV, 1213.

[10] Ibid., XXXIX, 413.

[11] Ibid., XLI, 1052.

restricted to each year;[1] and after 1928 it might be used in units up to six months within one year,[2] making it available for long illnesses.

When injuries to postal employees increased with use of postal cars and mechanical devices, mutual insurance first seemed the only escape from charity. Defalcation ruined one early effort of the railway postal clerks, but they persevered in their fraternal insurance.[3] After decades of requests by officials for accident allowances or government custody of employee contributions,[4] Congress in 1902 allowed a thousand dollars accidental death benefit for railway postal clerks,[5] doubled the sum in 1910,[6] in 1912 gave it to the families of the Titantic sea post clerks,[7] and to the families of other postal employees killed on duty in 1916, when provision also was made for disability treatment and compensation,[8] arrangements that were coordinated with the retirement system in 1920.

Retirement legislation was another product of postal professionalization. A retirement system was inevitable to cure the superannuation that arose with civil service classification, and various alternatives were discussed for two generations.[9]

---

[1] Ibid., XLIII, 1064, sec. 11.

[2] Ibid., XLV, 594-95.

[3] Marshall Cushing, The Story of Our Post Office (Boston, 1893), p. 837. Spero, op. cit., p. 120.

[4] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1885, p. 59.

[5] 32 Statutes 115.

[6] Ibid., XXXVI, 363.

[7] Ibid., XXXVII, 550.

[8] Ibid., XXXIX, 413.

[9] "Retirement of Civil Service Employees," Monthly Labor Review, X, 1490-92.

The employees usually sought straight civil pensions,[1] but officials tended to favor an employee savings fund managed by the government.[2] The experience of other countries seemed to indicate that a partially contributory plan, jointly financed by the employees and the government, was most feasible, and such a one was adopted in 1920.[3] Contributions and annuities were increased from time to time, and additional groups were covered by the system. The maximum annuity was raised to twelve hundred dollars a year in 1930, and retirement was permitted after thirty years of service or when employees reached the ages of sixty or sixty-three after fifteen years of service.[4] The government obligation for those in the classified service before contributions were begun was a large one, and the appropriations necessary to maintain the system soon will become large.

The powerful craft organizations that developed among postal employees after civil service classification were responsible for the great amount of legislation affecting postal employees. The letter carriers, the largest group, were easily organized nationally as well as locally, and they lobbied for higher wages, fewer hours, and improved conditions with much success. Their organization history was relatively uneventful, marked only by early assistance from the Knights of Labor, minor squabbles over assessments, and swinging with the tide into an affiliation with the American Federation of Labor. The railway

---

[1] 50th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 328. Luther Conant, A Critical Analysis of Industrial Pension Systems (New York, 1922), p. 21.

[2] 59th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Document 509. 60th Cong., 1st sess., Senate Document 308.

[3] 41 Statutes 614.

[4] Ibid., Vol. XLIV, Part 2, p. 904; Vol. XLVI, pp. 468-69.

postal clerks divided sharply over policies concerning wooden and insanitary cars, wrecks, and reduced car crews. Few deserted the Railway Mail Association and its insurance system, but when requests to the Department failed and the clerks saw that pitiless publicity and direct appeals to Congress brought improved conditions, the Association itself followed the revolters into labor affiliation, and retained it after postal officials confessed their errors and assumed a more conciliatory attitude. The post office clerks had an even stormier history. Organization, rift, reunion, and bitter separation took place within a few years, as factions fought over inclusion of supervisory officials, promotion assessments, and relations with the Department and with organized labor. Department influence was strong among them, for from their ranks many rose to supervisory positions; so the conservative group fought trade union influence and refrained from appeals to Congress in matters upon which the Department had taken a firm stand. The trade union group fought Department influence, and its efforts not only won the support of the largest number of post office clerks, but led or forced other postal crafts into the American Federation of Labor. The rural carriers, imbued with anti-labor, conservative, and political traditions of the country town, and isolated in small groups, developed only a weak confederation of state associations, dependent on a privately-owned newspaper for their official news. Rural carriers became well acquainted with patrons, and great political influence has been attributed to them. The post office laborers also were weak in organization; while postmasters have tended to form political rather than labor organizations.[1]

Employee organization antagonized postal officials. With

---

[1]Spero, op. cit., passim.

John Wanamaker, postmaster general from 1889 until 1893, employee relations were more than agreeable. The organizations still were young and were not very aggressive, while Wanamaker urged higher salaries and better working conditions. The carrier overtime controversy was in full swing, and a less capable and conciliatory official would have brought a storm about his head. Wanamaker disapproved of postmasters efforts to prevent employee appeals to Congress;[1] but by 1900 the Department was firm against employee lobbying, and the presidential "gag" orders and economy plans by 1910 almost provoked the employees to revolt.[2] Despite official hostility, however, the employees won improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions; and also a guarantee of the right to organize and to appeal to Congress.[3] Nevertheless, Postmaster General Burleson later sought to combine pitiless economy with antagonism to trade union affiliation. He opposed salary increases despite the greatly increased cost of living during and after the World War;[4] and persecuted or dismissed organization officers.[5] The letter carriers, the railway postal clerks, and even a few rural carriers replied by lining up with the radical post office clerks in affiliation with the American Federation of Labor. Will S. Hays came into the Department in 1921 with "humanizing" tactics and personnel work to wean the postal employees from organized labor;[6] but while recognition of the

---

[1]Ibid., p. 85. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1890, pp. 129-33.

[2]Spero, op. cit., pp. 122-23.

[3]37 Statutes 184, sec. 8.

[4]Spero, op. cit., pp. 189-96, 210-21. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1917, p. 33.

[5]William Hard, New Republic, XVIII, 369.

[6]Spero, op. cit., pp. 256-69.

postal unions was sweet to the veterans of a decade of conflict, their fond hopes for collective bargaining soon passed. The militants had not fought in vain, however, for the organizations were left free to plan their course without fear of dissolution.[1]

Honest and intelligent administration required a constant effort. The revolution in postal transportation, delivery, and service only slightly modified postal administration. The post office remained the spoils of faction and party; and postmasters general and their assistants came and went between 1861 and 1889 with the rapidity with which cabinets are shuffled in some modern states. A number of men served in several of the chief offices, but there was little continuity of policy. The post office drifted with the tides of politics and public opinion. Terms of officials even after 1889 were shorter than were those between the administrations of Jackson and Lincoln, in tremendous contrast to terms during the years of the Republic's founders.

Functions were multiplied and shifted. Wanamaker in 1889 dreamed of re-organizing the Department by functions, and also of dividing the field service into a hundred districts, similar to the plan of Sweden.[2] Later postmasters general urged parts of that plan for supervision and consolidation;[3] and a congressional commission suggested a permanent director of posts, seven assistants in charge of separate postal functions, fifteen to twenty postal districts, and a commission on mail classification and fraud order appeals.[4] Belatedly, post office accounting was

---

[1]Spero, op. cit., p. 269.

[2]Postmaster General, Annual Reports, 1889, pp. 8-9; 1892, pp. 33-34.

[3]Ibid., 1896, pp. 13, 15.

[4]60th Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Rep. 701, Part 1, pp. 3-7.

revised somewhat in accordance with the commission's plan,[1] but new Department positions were retained for political favorites.

The tragic era of reconstruction following the Civil War saw the post office easy prey to business piracy and political corruption. Officials substituted for the old traditional safeguards rulings that enabled contractors to demoralize contract arrangements and to secure large profits from the government.[2] As in the eighteen thirties, officials extended routes improvidently and paid for imaginary improved service;[3] straw bids were multiplied to force profitable special contracts,[4] and the legislation sought by postal officials to correct evils perhaps only increased them;[5] while party leaders prevented full investigation of the scandals,[6] and offered for sacrifice a few insignificant clerks when the stench could be impounded no longer. Exposure came only when the administration lost control of the House of Representatives.[7] The professional contractor eventually lost power with substitution of railroad for coach routes, and with the requirement that contractors live on or adjacent to their routes.[8] Dishonest officials then turned to supply contracts, rewarding manufacturers and collecting graft on such a widespread scale that stories which came to the ears of reform government

---

[1] 42 Statutes 25. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1923, p. 66.

[2] 40th Cong., 3rd sess., House Report 37, pp. 11ff.

[3] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1881, pp. 478-87.

[4] 42nd Cong., 4th sess., House Report 38, pp. 7, 10-11. 44th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 814, pp. II-IV.

[5] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1881, p. 491.

[6] 43rd Cong., 1st sess., House Report 783, pp. 5-7.

[7] 44th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 814, p. I.

[8] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1884, pp. 21-22, 99.

leaders brought investigations, charges, and conviction of several prominent bureau heads.[1] The superiors of these men were smirched, and they retaliated by forcing out of the Department their colleague who uncovered the damaging facts.[2] Favoritism continues to rear its ugly head in post office building rental contracts.[3]

Administrators presented fewer opportunities to those who challenged the wisdom of governmental philosophy and action. The mail robbers seized by the post office inspectors had their day in court,[4] but a muzzle awaited those who sought to convince the sovereign people of the United States that the policies of their war-time leaders were wrong. In 1861 Postmaster General Blair, referring to anti-slavery literature precedents, excluded from the mails anti-administration newspapers that were found by a Federal circuit court to violate no law. Blair insisted that freedom of the press was not involved, and that the mails were not intended to be used for destruction of the government.[5]

Again, during the World War, statements that were deemed to interfere with the sale of government securities, with recruiting or prosecution of the war, or operation of the military or naval forces, were denied circulation in the mails,[6] but by legislation rather than administrative fiat. The effect was a virtual press censorship, for editors might dissent only in

---

[1] 58th Cong., 2nd sess., House Doc. 383; House Rep. 2372.

[2] Information from a former Department clerk.

[3] Chicago Daily News, Nov. 13, 1930, p. 3.

[4] Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1886, pp. 120, 137.

[5] 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Report 51, pp. 3-15; Sen. Ex. Doc. 1, Vol. III, pp. 583-84. Congressional Globe, XXXIII, Appendix, pp. 164-65.

[6] 40 Statutes 217-18, 230-31, 425-26, 553-54.

details and not in principle.[1] Pacifist and socialist literature was held up or destroyed during the war designed to end war;[2] and circulation was denied to matter that later proved to represent the views of large groups of persons, conservative as well as radical.[3]

Fearful of freedom degenerating into licence, Postmaster General Blair during the Civil War excluded from the mails obscene matter, and declared his readiness to withhold anarchistic literature.[4] Apparently entertaining doubt of such authority in time of peace, however, in 1865 he persuaded Congress to enact its first obscenity statute, which from time to time was extended to include every type of immoral literature or device.[5] Religious opinion is divided on birth control, and widespread private practice and drug advertising indicate that public opinion hardly supports the law.

Denial of postal privileges soon was extended from obscene matter to fraudulent and lottery materials. Lotteries continued to operate actively for many years, however, until "fraud" orders checked payment of money orders to lottery promoters and their agents, and lottery materials also were denied transportation by all common carriers in interstate commerce.[6] In view of the legalization by some states of pari-mutuel betting on horse

---

[1]Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1919, p. 22.

[2]Lucy Salmon, The Newspaper and Authority (New York, 1923), p. 162. American Labor Year Book, 1919-1920, pp. 95-96.

[3]William Hard, "Mr. Burleson, Espionagent," "Mr. Burleson, Section 481½B," New Republic, XIX, 42, 76-78.

[4]37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Report 54, pp. 8-9.

[5]Congressional Globe, XXXV, 660-61. Statutes, XIII, 507; XVII, 598-600; XIX, 90; XXV, 496; XXXV, 1129.

[6]Ibid., XV, 195; XVII, 283, 302; XIX, 90; XXVI, 465; XXVIII, 963-64. Postmaster General, Annual Report, 1889, p. 40.

races, and official lenience toward fraternal prize contest promoters, the lottery laws may not reflect current public opinion. Fraudulent schemes continue to abound,[1] limited by the ability of swindlers to develop new projects and evade postal detection and conviction. Promoters have sought judicial review of the facts as well as the law involved in fraud orders,[2] but without success. The denial to prize fight pictures of transmission by common carriers is another phase of the gulf between the law and public opinion.[3] The repeal of national prohibition brings a heavy burden upon the post office to keep liquor advertisments from states which prohibit them.[4]

Postal policy thus has denied circulation to matter which contemporary public opinion deemed destructive of public order, morals, and economic welfare. The "eternal verities" in statutes or constitutions have not kept officials from acts dictated by those who possess economic and political power. Democracy does not ensure intelligent, courageous, liberty-loving officials.

Supervision has changed from loose oversight over many offices to close attention to comparatively few ones. Rural delivery doomed tens of thousands of country store post offices. Contrary to the traditional thinking of business men, government buildings shelter few post offices. Worthwhile postmasterships appeal to the party-minded and offer little opportunity to the professional postal employee, great as is the need for the latter.

---

[1] Ibid., 1905, p. 28; 1906, p. 89; 1910, pp. 53-55; 1917, p. 73.

[2] 67th Cong., 2nd sess., House Report 760, p. 7. 59th Cong., 1st sess., House Report 4919, pp. 1-5.

[3] 54th Cong., 2nd sess., House Report 3046. Statutes, XXIX, 5; XXXVII, 240; Vol. XLIV, Part 1, p. 494.

[4] Ibid., Vol. XXXIX, p. 1069, sec. 5.

INTERPRETATION

The United States Post Office thus has been moulded by the great controlling forces in the life of the people of the great North American republic. As the servant of the nation, its experiences and character have been formed by the factors that have dominated the country's economic and social affairs, particularly territorial expansion, the revolution in transportation, the growth of the city, and the democratic movement.

The post office followed the nation's vanguard. The extension of United States postal service involved primarily the establishment of offices and of land and sea routes to regions occupied by the farmer, the merchant, and the manufacturer as they followed the trapper, the fur trader, the prospector, the land speculator, the soldier, and the civil governor and judge onto the frontier. Barely second in importance or in time, however, was the development and use of the post offices and postal routes of foreign lands as a result of numerous postal conventions and treaties, the scope of which constantly tended to increase as United States merchants carried their wares to Europe, Africa, and Asia, and brought back not only luxuries but goods that enter as raw materials into the myriad products of the modern factory system, struggling for markets to secure profits to uphold its complex financial structure and to maintain the delicate adjustment of human affairs under modern industrialism. While the post office usually went no farther than the flag, the international agreements for exchange of postal matter increasingly brought it about that letters passed between postal systems with little more

delay or charge than those to which domestic mail matter was subjected. The dominance of nationalism in the nineteenth century obscured for many the steady and peaceful development of the Universal Postal Union, significant in name as well as in its results. In the direction of the affairs of this world postal system, the representatives of all nations appear to have learned that an injury to one is a harm to all, and with mutual consideration they have moulded their policies toward a common goal.

The steam engine brought a new postal era. In earlier ages the sea, even with the art of navigation and the technique of ship construction imperfectly developed, had been the great link between the capitals of empires and also between the marts of trade. The highways of Rome and of China were among the prosaic wonders of the world, and contributed much to the maintenance of those far-flung empires; but the sea was the moulder of the destiny of empires in the early modern era, and preeminence passed from Constantinople, Venice, and other Mediterranean ports as all-sea routes to India and the western hemisphere entered the consciousness of mankind. Favorable opportunities for use of ships made small nations respected and feared by larger powers, and caused rulers to place high values upon island possessions. As trails became roads and then highways, however, the internal trade barriers weakened, and increasing recognition was accorded production and trade for the domestic market as the chief basis of national wealth. In the United States the railroad and the steamship slowly but inevitably swung their tremendous power and capacity into exploitation of both the continental domain and the seaports of all the earth. Distant inland areas ceased to be chiefly areas for the trapper and trader, or for self-sufficient farm families, and were forced by the new steam vehicles to

abandon their system of economy and to enter into competition with the production and trade of all the earth. The railway post office and the sea post office, of practically limitless capacities, became the dominant elements in modern postal systems, leaving the post rider and the mail coach or wagon to side routes and to mountainous inaccessible territory. The railroad was not allowed to rest upon its laurels, however, for the automobile and the airplane gave promise of more-flexible and faster service, and today they supplement the older established lines of mail transport, catering particularly to the new business needs of the city and the long-felt needs of rural districts avoided by the rail communication net. Airplane interests also seek routes by which aircraft may draw mails and passengers from steamships.

Modern postal service reflects the city. In its modern size and composition, the city is the child of the new transportation and the mechanical inventions which gave new impulse to commerce and industry. The railroad and the steamship carried from plantation, farm, mine, and forest the gigantic stock of raw materials that are fed into the modern factory; and distributed therefrom finished goods into stores, offices, and homes to give comforts which earlier ages did not know. City and town grew under the impact of the new forces, the aggregations multiplied in size, and increasing interdependence characterized the lives of the tens of millions of people separated from the soil. To keep pace with the growth of the city, the United States Post Office took over and enlarged the private and semi-public penny posts of the largest places; and, in recognition of the growing distances between post offices and homes or places of business, and also of the pressing need for economy of time and effort in modern life, not only extended the service within cities but

developed it in comparatively small towns. These accomplishments included both the free collection of mail from boxes in office buildings, stores, or on street corners, and the delivery of mail to homes and places of business.

The city also experienced a transportation revolution of its own, which was reflected in additional postal changes. Rapid local transit was sought by shoppers, laborers, merchants, and professional men so they might live in the suburbs or even in areas but a little way removed from the central business or manufacturing areas of the metropolitan communities; and postal service was hard pressed to avoid the delays produced by growing traffic congestion. National and local postal officials scoured the postal possibilities of each new type of local transportation; and in rapid succession the street car, the pneumatic tube, and the motor truck were used for local mail service. Postal street cars and apartments conflicted with passenger service requirements, however, and the pneumatic tube proved to be structurally weak and of insufficient capacity to be worthwhile in any but greatly congested business areas; but the automobile truck won universal acclaim for its capacity, speed, flexibility, and cheapness, and it soon dominated urban mail service.

The cry for social justice changed postal institutions. No less important in United States postal history is the set of forces growing out of the democratic movement. The American people traditionally dislike discrimination, and have assumed that governmental policy and action should foster equality of opportunity, which was expected to enable the nation to steer between the rock of plutocratic aristocracy and the whirlpool of communistic equalitarianism.

Even before the multiplication of classes of mail matter

and of special services, postal rates were scrutinized, compared with what private enterprise would fix, and any great differential was pointed to as an injustice. Southern statesmen frequently objected to large postal expenditures on the ground that partial support of the post office by the Treasury imposed a burden on the taxpayer, the farmer, and the laboring man for the benefit of the merchant, the manufacturer, and the lovelorn. Rural leaders voiced the feeling of many that their interests had been neglected, as they at first struggled to secure " a few thousands for 'experimental' rural delivery" after millions had been appropriated for city delivery, for railway postal cars, and for fast mail trains. Rural delivery was developed throughout the nation at a time when the "Country Life Movement" was attracting attention, following the demands of Western farmers and other debtors for inflation during the long decline of prices following the Civil War, and their agitation for lower railroad rates. There was fairly general agreement that urban opportunities for comfort, leisure, and culture might draw from the farms too many young people of initiative and intelligence, so Congress eventually insisted that "something be done about it." Rural delivery was followed by adoption of the parcels post, and then by special efforts to develop direct marketing between farmer and city consumer, in the hope that farm income might be increased and the urban cost of living lowered.

The long series of laws increasing salaries of postal employees, shortening work periods, granting sick leaves and vacations with pay, providing compensation for service accidents, and allowing them retirement pay usually were urged with the plea that government employees were not allowed to take advantage of competitive forces, and that as a matter of justice and national

capacity to pay those things were due them. When there appeared doubt if persons in private industry secured the advantages urged for government employees, there came forth a suggestion that as a model employer the government owed a duty to all wage-earners to set standards for private industry by its own example. Plutocracy already was discredited, and requests from those who received a small portion of the national income were given consideration, even when the possessors of great wealth and large incomes seemed to control the nation and Congress. If the captains of industry were not acquainted with the idea that the capitalist class must not keep all the profits, but for its own safety and development must share a portion with the masses, they as employers at least recognized the necessity of keeping the employees and the public "satisfied."

The post office has moulded national life. While, therefore, the United States Post Office has been moulded by the forces that have shaped the social and economic development of the United States, it must not be assumed that the post office has been a mere passive agency in national affairs. For many postal service has been the great means of education. The expansion of social and business correspondence, of advertising, and of newspaper circulation were due largely to low postal rates. The increased rapidity of turnover of goods in retail stores is due in considerable part to the fact that replacements may be delivered soon after they are ordered. Large stocks, therefore, need not be kept, thanks to postal and transportation services. Transactions by mail may be completed in hours or days rather than in the weeks or months that were standard at the foundation of the Republic.

National development also reveals the peculiar imprint of

the post office: First, in the way the postal function has been performed; Second, in the role imposed upon the post office by the nation, which has made it and kept it a government rather than a private institution; Third, in the factors that account for the post office regularly having a deficit, while European and many other systems normally produce a surplus; Fourth, in the uses to which the post office has been put as a device for social control; and, Fifth, in the part that postal administrators have played in United States postal history.

The two basically different ways by which the postal function might be carried on are exclusive government operation or exclusive private operation. Postal systems generally are operated by governments, but to varying degree the particular services are performed by government agencies or by private enterprise. The citizen wishes to know the merits and evils of contracting for service and of government operation; while the theorist wishes a glimpse of what might have happened had the post office been a private enterprise. The chief factors by which postal service in a democracy may be judged are: (1) its ability to perform adequate and impartial service; (2) moderation of cost, social as well as financial; (3) maintenance of proper labor standards; and (4) contribution to national development.

Among the chief merits of government contracting with private enterprise for postal service are that it reduces the government capital outlay, that it eliminates developmental risks, that it permits combination of other business with postal service, reducing the cost of all; and that it contributes to develop new industries. The chief evils of contracting are its possible ultimate high cost, due to contractors risks, especially uncertainty as to future use of equipment; its encouragement of

collusion between contractors in bidding; its development of lobbying before Congress, and the use by business leaders of influence with officials to increase contract compensation and to insure future contracts; and its probable low labor and service standards.

The chief merits of government operation are its high service and labor standards, resulting in more-extensive and detailed service than private industry tends to give; the fact that a somewhat better idea can be secured of the items of cost involved; a somewhat fairer rate system than private industry tends to set up; and its more impartial service. Government operation has its evils of bureaucratic incompetence and corruption, the difficulties placed in its way by displeased private interests, the liklihood of wasteful expenditures, and the efforts of officials and employees to strive to increase their pay and privileges beyond reasonable limits.

Had the post office been subjected to private operation, and conducted as the railroad, express, telegraph, telephone, and radio companies have been managed, it is highly probable that rates of postage would have been higher, and that earlier there would have been marked discrimination between individuals, localities, and products. The periodical rate would have depended largely on the presence or absence of a community of interest between the postal system and the publishers. Routes and offices would have been added much more slowly, especially on the frontier and in rural districts; while service in the main city business districts would have been better, especially prior to the Civil War. The wages, hours, and working conditions of postal employees would have been less favorable to them, more comparable to those that have prevailed in stores, factories, and the

express and telephone services than to those enjoyed by railroad employees. The public would have used the mails somewhat less, and business development and social and intellectual activity might have been somewhat less advanced, while the public would have been inclined to believe that privacy of the mails was not assured.

The role assigned to the post office kept it a government service. Long the sole important Federal business enterprise, the position of the post office in a country long dominated so completely by the philosophy of individualism and so committed to private enterprise often has drawn attention. The clue is the deficit, but even its explanation is a matter of history, in which governmental principles and fortune are involved.

Early governments in the North American colonies sought to encourage and systematize postal service, but the early semi-official ventures were not self-supporting and the private services were irregular and inadequate. The concept of the post as a source of revenue dominated the British Post Office. When the Colonial Post Office was planned, the seventeenth century grant was limited to twenty years, detailed financial accounts to the British postmasters general were required, and the rates established required approval by the provincial legislatures, so it decidedly was not a free private enterprise of the type to which rugged captains of industry or finance two centuries later were accustomed. When public response to the post gave promise that the day of deficits was past, British postal officials refused to promise to renew the grant, then bought and took over the service, perhaps influenced in part by another guiding thought of British postal policy, that of exercising a check upon treasonable correspondence.

By eighteenth century standards, the post office appeared to Adam Smith, the father of classical economic theory, as the only mercantile enterprise that had been carried on successfully by all types of governments, due to its simplicity of operation, its small capital outlay, and its certain and immediate revenue.[1] Postal historians, noting faults of management and public service, rather than contemporary government and private industries, have not given such blanket approval; but the founding fathers of the American nation did not hesitate to accept either British postal traditions or political theories that were favorable to their objectives. Consequently, during the Revolutionary War the letters of persons suspected of treason were opened by order of the Continental Congress; and, following the restoration of peace, the post office not only was operated to pay off its own war-time deficit, but the Articles of Confederation arranged for disposal of a postal surplus. Thus far the post office had been a government service because a surplus was expected, but the tide of finance was to change without a transfer to private industry.

Once finances and government stability were assured, the United States Post Office was subjected to widespread pressure for expansion of its operations throughout the areas of settlement, and routes and offices soon were established even in the regions where revenues fell short of expenditures. Fears that the region between the Appalachians and the Mississippi might secede from the Union or be conquered by some foreign power encouraged frequent postal service, to bind that section to the Union. There was the task of developing a consciousness among all the people of their American nationality, their common heritage, and their common future; and local politicians, contractors,

---

[1] The Wealth of Nations (Bax ed.; London, 1896), II, 343-44.

and newspaper editors stressed utterances of President Washington and other leaders concerning the value of the post office and of newspapers not only to obtain additional routes and offices, thereby giving added territory for newspaper circulation, but also to secure low rates. Offices meant political jobs, routes meant contracts, and low postage meant newspaper profits, so a triumvirate was formed that has continued to dominate United States postal policy. Editors never forgot the freedom from postage that some enjoyed as a matter of personal favor during part of the Colonial period; and the country weeklies eventually secured and retained free circulation within their counties. Granted rates lower than independent private enterprise would have granted, and with the post office operating many unprofitable routes and offices, editors assumed as a matter of course that the post office should be a government enterprise, and that the deficits were necessary to the development of the nation's economic and social resources. Their views were well within the individualistic tradition, too, for Adam Smith also had stated that the government should undertake certain work which would be unprofitable to individuals.[1]

The subsequent history of the United States Post Office reveals similar pressure for unprofitable extensions of service; the land and sea routes to the Far West, the development of postal cars and fast mail trains, widespread city and rural delivery, ocean mail subsidies, and the air mail. The public was encouraged to want and to insist on such service, and its financial bases often were only briefly considered.

The people of the United States also inherited with other British traditions a strong dislike for private monopolies, and

---

[1] Ibid., II, 241.

that frame of mind has continued to keep the post office out of private hands, and to replace private with public service as social needs grew. True, the public welcomed the early competition of the express companies with the post office, but an express company proposal to take over the entire service never was placed before the people, undoubtedly because it would have fastened high rates upon the nation. The long struggle to reduce railroad compensation for mail transportation and to secure control over mail train schedules was in marked contrast to the short efforts to reduce rates of postage. The lesson hardly was lost upon business men, editors, or other citizens.

The quick response by rural carriers to a suggestion in 1914 that the rural delivery service be let out to contractors illustrates the storm of protest that the large employee groups today would give to surrender of important postal operations to private enterprise. The silence of government pilots when the air mail was transferred to private contractors in 1926 perhaps was due to their prospect for even higher salaries as passenger, express, and mail services were combined under the encouragement of generous mail contracts. Postal employees usually faced the prospect of lower pay in private employment.

United States postal costs have been high. The United States Post Office has not been self-supporting, whereas in many countries the postal system normally has been a source of government revenue even after services were developed intensively, rates were reduced along the lines of British penny postage, and parcels of considerable size were accepted.

First among the factors explaining this difference is the vast territorial expanse of the United States. The railroad and the airplane are most advantageously employed over large areas,

but mail transportation costs remain greater than in most countries. A second factor is the relatively sparse population and frontier culture of the United States. A people scattered over a large area, and writing fewer letters than did the people of Great Britain, due to isolation, a newer economic organization, and a more primitive culture, permitted less economical use of transportation, office, and delivery services. A third factor is the higher postal expenses in the United States, due to its much higher scales of wages, higher standard of living, and higher commodity prices. A fourth factor is use of the post office as an agency of national development. Each addition of territory, each wave of settlement, each movement toward wider international relations usually involved new postal services, new postal expenditures. The post office was expected to follow the flag, the settler, and the merchant, terrific as was the expense. The service always was relatively intensive and frequent, and the deficits before the Civil War were a much larger proportion of all postal expenditures than recent ones have been.

A fifth factor is found in the exemptions from postage and extremely low rates. Congressmen, officials, and government offices and agencies enjoy postage exemption, and weekly newspapers within their county and publications for the blind without advertising also pass free. Franking and use of the special penalty envelopes save the extra cost of stamps or of calculation of postage, but they introduce uncertainty into postal cost accounting. The low pound bulk rate on periodicals, which encouraged an age of advertising, caused expenditures in excess of the revenues from periodicals, and must be considered at length.

The position of the periodical---the newspaper and the magazine---in the economic and political life of the United

States makes the question of its postal rates highly controversial, provoking more heat than light. Postal costs are largely joint costs, satisfactory apportionment of the large system overhead expenditure is difficult and can never be absolutely accurate. A complete investigation of periodical postal expenditures requires long, tedious, extremely expensive, and searching attention to facts and figures secured with great difficulty and inconvenience to both postal employees and the public. Also, the pitfalls in the analysis of these figures are many. Nevertheless, all the available data, early and late, indicate that periodicals have not paid either their pro rata share or their fair share of postal expenditures, even if account is taken of the fact that letters receive prior attention, that the postal system exists primarily for letter mail, that periodicals frequently utilize spare postal time, and that cheaper less expert labor may be utilized in their distribution. The official cost accounting has not considered these factors, but experimental weighting of the official final expenditure results, charging letters four times as much as periodicals, seems to leave the matter beyond serious question, unless one assumes, as publisher spokesmen and even postmasters general have tended to do, that only the costs which can be completely and directly assessed against periodicals should be considered.

The recent elimination of the rate differential between the advertising pages and other sections of periodicals mailed to nearby zones not only emphasizes the difficulty encountered in establishing and maintaining an adequate rate on periodicals, but raises anew the question of the taxpayers subsidization of the periodical publishing business. The course of rate changes of recent years has been that when wage and other expenditures were

increased, all rates usually were increased; then, quietly, a short time later, periodical rates were lowered, while other rates remained at the new high level.

Periodicals are entitled to the lowest possible rate that reasonable, accurate, and complete cost accounting may establish. If some general rules could separate the publications of value for their news, literary, educational, scientific, and other worthwhile features from those with imaginary "true" stories that encumber newsstands and stores, a part of the cost of handling the former could well be charged openly to the Treasury and the taxpayer. The task may be one that in a democracy had better not be attempted, and a profits tax on periodicals may be the best solution for fixing rates on matter that so mingles public information and private gain. Yet the post office long has exercised social control of several types.

The post office has repressed as well as encouraged. The post office was expected to function for law and order. Postmasters withdrew anti-slavery papers from the mails, on the plea that to deliver them would violate state laws and also lead to riots and insurrections. During the Civil War the postmaster general excluded from the mails certain newspapers which he considered hostile to the Union, and stated that he was ready to exclude matter that advocated violence of destruction of property. Then, during the World War, Congress provided for a censorship of foreign mail, and penalized heavily the publication of news or of articles that were deemed to obstruct the government's war plans. The post office also came to be an instrument for protection of the public from lotteries and other games of chance and fraudulent schemes, and has become one of the guardians of public morals through early administrative rulings and later legislation

respecting obscene matter in the mails and the exclusion from interstate commerce as well of prize fight pictures and films. What lessons may be drawn from this post office social control?

First: For short periods, as in war-time, or where an overwhelming interest is dominant, arbitrary interference has been tolerated. The Southern postmasters applied their ban on anti-slavery literature with great success, for the Southern families which owned slaves dominated politics, the church, the school, and business; and most of the non-slaveowners either moved to free areas, acquiesced in the slave system, or enthusiastically supported it.

Second: Public opinion cannot long be kept favorable to methods of control that discriminate between persons, especially those which seem to bear harshly on the poor or on the well-behaved dissenter. The zeal for war-time restrictions passed quickly, and the cases of small organizations and of radical individuals frequently received aid as well as sympathy from conservative persons. Politics made easier the Department statement in 1921 that unjustified discrimination had been practiced, but application of mere technical grounds tended to pass away. Enforcement of the regulations entitling periodicals not primarily for advertising purposes to the low pound rates achieved a measure of success only when officials applied impartial tests, such as unclaimed and refused copies and subscriptions at nominal rates, while they abandoned tests and acts that suggested espionage and persecution.

Third: When there is no emergency, public opinion must be developed gradually to support exclusion, even though decreed by Congress, and won to support more stringent regulations. Lotteries and fraudulent schemes have been checked slowly and with

little publicity. While lotteries generally were unlawful and were viewed with disfavor, the early direct frontal methods against them failed, because people who bought tickets would not tell, and juries would not convict. Officials were forced to await development of public and clarification of judical opinion to support measures to cut off lottery revenues, by fraud orders applying to all known lottery agents, a procedure which did not involve criminal trials. The ban on fraudulent schemes has been applied on a small scale, and disaster has not been courted by choice of many borderline cases.

Fourth: Restrictions must be relaxed as public opinion changes. Prize fight pictures and films now pass by private motor car, and public opinion does not favor their exclusion from public view. Public opinion generally has approved exclusion from the mails of genuinely obscene and immoral matter. Officials early sought unsuccessfully to exclude publications which held up religious bodies and practices to scorn, and later efforts toward those which treat sex and religion frankly have not received wide support. Officials have been losing cases or winning disastrous victories over scientific books and pamphlets which aim to inform the public as to saner and healthier sex attitudes and practices. Claimed works of literature also are receiving more and more protection from the courts. Controlling religious opinion yet requires that avowed contraconceptive materials be excluded from the mails; but public opinion recently has supported great frankness in advertising concerning sex products, and some of the goods listed in mail order catalogues for "feminine" and "marriage" hygiene appear to be intended for contraconceptive use. As the public purchases drug preparations which manufacturers dare not label accurately, the law has made a field for the worst

types of "quack" practice. Though the birth control controversy appears to be narrowing so that the issue is one of method rather than of intended result, that may not forecast a change in postal laws or their administration.

Fifth: Success of postal restrictions requires impartial and independent public hearings in cases where serious doubt is raised as to the facts or the law involved. In fraud order cases the rulings of the postmaster general on questions of fact have been upheld by the courts; but as judges will review cases to ascertain if the facts bring the cases within the law, or if the law has been properly applied, the effect is to air enough of the cases so that arbitrary action is prevented. The public prefers to take its case to a traditional agency, such as the courts, and would suspect a new body, like a departmental appeal board, of dependence on the administration.

Postal leadership has shown flashes of genius. The work of many postal officials may have gone to develop projects that came into public view from obscurity. The increasingly short terms of assistant postmasters general and also their increasing preoccupation with politics has reduced their contribution; but before the Civil War a number seem actually to have moulded the Department's policies. Among the early employees, merit was the rule and political favor one of the amenities to be observed. The rise of the spoils system changed the standard to all the politics possible that did not bring open public revolt. Finally merit was written into the laws, so that those who are favored of politics must rank high among those who present their merit qualifications and ask appointment; although for certain positions the points on which candidates are rated assure a high rank to those who have political influence. The record of postmasters

for initiative seems to be good in the story of city mail transportation evolution, but they appear to have lacked intelligence or courage in the face of local vested interests.

The postal service has contributed more political jobs than other national organizations, so the postmaster general usually has been the chief party organizer of his day. Postal officials have tended to build political fences rather than develop postal service. The record of postmasters general closely parallels that of the Presidents of the United States. Every generation or two has given an outstanding leader who set in order the postal system of his day and marked out the lines of its future progress. No Colonial postal effort became successful until a capable statesman personally devoted himself to the task. Then when the Colonial Post Office had sunk into a state of coma, there appeared a great business man and diplomat who, again in person, set it straight. None of the postmasters general of the Republic's founding fathers were particularly distinguished, but several held office for long terms and kept postal progress in line with national expansion and development. Amid the smoke of the Civil War there appeared another statesman who recognized the trends of his time and completed much of the postal revolution begun by the railroad, the city, and the steamship. Then a generation later a great business man marked out all the lines of postal progress to the present day except those brought by later transportation inventions. The times give opportunities, and leadership brings what is latent to fulfilment. Longer terms might have produced more-mature plans, but hardly stronger leadership; and one may doubt if private business succeeds any better in developing leadership, for those who must struggle against powerful vested interests to reform the post office, as

usually is the case, must accomplish their objectives quickly.[1]

The political atmosphere of the post office has rendered it particularly subject to corruption. On several occasions, a considerable number of postmasters were affected by the dishonesty that had been permitted to prevail among contractors. The besetting sin of bureaucracy, exclusive concern for traditional practices and the convenience of the staff, as yet has become no crying evil, either because tenure still is precarious or because social and economic changes have kept postal matters in flux. The hostility of United States business men to government institutionalism perhaps will operate to check bureaucratic traditions. Congress also keeps a critical eye trained on government agencies and lashes out at them when activities and expenditures excite its displeasure. The danger of the post office is that politics will allow or force practices that insure safety and prosperity for employees and officials but a heavy bill for users of the mails and the taxpayer. The post office may continue to harbor evils because political parties tend to refuse to make issues of practices that mean jobs and contracts and low rates, concerning which parties do not differ.

---

[1] J. C. Hemmeon, History of the British Post Office (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1912), p. 31: "He who would reform the post office must be prepared to take his official life in his hands."